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Handbook of Thesis Work

for MA Students in

Culture, Communication and Globalization (CCG)

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2012 revised edition by

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on the basis of original guidelines authored by
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Preface

Thesis writing is considered by many to be the best part of MA studies. Here, finally, you are allowed to go really deep into a topic that you find fascinating, and here is the opportunity to 'shine' and display all the academic skills you have acquired during your years in university. Producing a high quality thesis, however, is also a bit of a challenge. By clarifying the demands and providing some useful pieces of advice with regard to some potential practical and academic hurdles, we believe we can assist you in making your thesis writing process a relatively smooth, even enjoyable, ride.

This handbook is meant to provide information about requirements, good advice on how to get started on thesis writing, on how to plan the process – and keep it going – submission and examination. It does not give its readers the secret recipe for writing a perfect thesis – such a recipe does not exist. Also it is not meant to rehearse *all* the elements that go into a thesis. Much, such as note taking, proper use of sources, methodological considerations and referencing, are academic skills in which you will be experienced already at this stage. Should you still feel the need to refresh or reacquaint yourself with the basics of PBL, academic work and project writing, please refer to other handbooks and guidelines provided by the study board.

The thesis is very much an extension of the kind of work that you have been doing in your Bachelor's and, particularly, Master's programmes. A thesis obviously distinguishes itself from projects produced in preceding semesters by being more in-depth and ambitious with respect to its research, methodology, application of theory and analysis. Still, the elementary principles are not so very different from those you are accustomed to in project work.

At times, you will find that this handbook explains, like a manual, which is the proper way to go about the specifics of thesis writing (mostly with regard to formal requirements). However, it also strives to be inspirational, like a guide, and offer possible vistas and solutions from which you will yourself have to choose.

So read the handbook before you get started writing your thesis and pick it up every once in a while for a little practical or moral support, as well as towards the end of your writing process to double-check that your thesis fulfils the requirements and to re-acquaint yourself with formal procedures.

Best wishes for a fruitful thesis module!

Robert C. Thomsen,
for the Study Board for Cross-Cultural Studies, January 2012.

1. Formal requirements for MA theses under the Study Board

According to the September 2011 'Regulations and Curriculum' of the MA in Culture, Communication and Globalisation, the Master's thesis, when passed, will provide you with 30 ECTS points, and thus fulfil the final requirement of your degree.

Please note that to receive approval of a thesis topic and to be assigned a thesis supervisor, the completion of all previous exams/modules of the MA programme is required. For practical reasons, you may still not have received your final grade(s) before applying for a thesis supervisor and approval of your topic, which is fine, but you *must* pass all other exams before you begin writing your thesis. This also means that any assignment of a supervisor to you is conditional on you passing all exams prior to the thesis module.

1.1 Topic requirements

Students must prepare their MA thesis on a topic which is freely chosen from within the framework of the programme. In order to fulfil requirements for 'specialisation', however, CCG students must choose to write within a topic that falls within their chosen stream. I.e., either of the following:

- Consumption and Market Communication
- Organization and Leadership
- International Relations and the Global Order
- International Migration and Ethnic Relations

Students who choose to graduate within the cross-disciplinary generalist stream are free to select their subject from within the framework of the entire programme – any stream(s).

1.2 Other formal issues

There are several objectives as regards the expected learning outcome of this final module, and it makes little sense to expand on those in this document. As for the specific objectives (knowledge and understanding, skills, and competencies), you should consult the CCG Regulations and Curriculum (*Studieordning*; section 14; cf. the programme website). These are important also in the sense that it is on the basis of those your thesis and defence will be assessed.

Your thesis must be between 35 pages (min.) and 70 pages (max.) per student, or 80 pages (max.) if you are writing the thesis on your own. You are also required to include an abstract in English (min. 1 page, max. 2 pages).

A standard page is defined as 2400 keystrokes, including spaces. The established page requirements apply only to the actual thesis text. This means that items such as the title page, preface, table of contents, bibliography and appendices are not included. Footnotes and endnotes, however, are.

The number of keystrokes must be stated on the title page of the thesis. A thesis can not be evaluated without this specification or if the thesis exceeds the maximum number of pages. Don't try to cheat with the counting! If that little bluff is revealed, a case of cheating must be reported to the Programme Director, and it might have severe repercussions.

If the thesis is written in a group (max. 3 persons) division of labour has to be clearly stated (the introduction, the conclusion, abstract and appendices can be listed as shared responsibilities). This is necessary to ensure that individual evaluations can take place.

Eventually, you will submit your thesis which will be assessed by an internal examiner (your supervisor) and an external examiner, and later you must 'defend' your thesis at the oral exam which, apart from the time allocated (45 minutes instead of 30 minutes), is not much different from an ordinary project exam. Your thesis and defence performance will then be graded according to the 7-point scale (one combined grade, with emphasis on the written performance) – and you will have concluded your studies, and earned your Master's degree..

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Please acquaint yourself with the general MA Thesis regulations of the Faculty of Humanities also. You find them at <http://fak.hum.aau.dk/index.php?id=910>.

2. Getting started, practical issues

2.1 Group or solo?

A thesis can be produced individually or by a group of no more than three people. Most choose to write a thesis alone or in a group of two. In recent years, an increasing number of students have chosen to write their thesis as a group, and there certainly are benefits to this approach, such as coverage of larger theoretical and empirical ground, a larger bulk of supervision hours available, and the possibility of constant sparring about difficult theoretical and methodological issues, for example, with someone 'in the know'. Furthermore, some students feel they need the moral support and/or the moral responsibility to a fellow student to be able to produce and deliver drafts on time.

On the other hand, writing solo also means that you'll be 'in charge'. You will rarely have to compromise because there will be no one to object (except, perhaps your supervisor). Experience tells us that the soloist typically is more dependent on his or her supervisor, because the supervisor is often seen as the only real sparring partner. Writing on your own also gives you the opportunity to expand your research interests from your internship semester (or other earlier semesters) into your thesis semester and thereby benefit from knowledge and insights already acquired.

In the end, it is completely up to you to decide which form of thesis writing is preferable to you at this point of your academic development. The important thing is that you give this proper thought so that you will not risk regretting your choice in the middle of the process.

2.2 Thesis Contract (approval of topic and applying for a supervisor)

When you have chosen a topic, you need to have it approved, and to have a supervisor assigned to you. For this purpose you must submit a *Thesis Contract* containing:

- a synopsis including theoretical and methodological points of departure (only points of departure, nothing finite)
- a description of the main structure of the thesis
- choice of writing period/submission deadline

You submit and have your contract approved by following this procedure:

1) Download the thesis contract from the relevant section of the programme web-site or Moodle.

2) Fill in the first page with the information listed above (30-40 lines) as well as your request for a supervisor, if any. Then choose the relevant date for handing in. Starting dates are set as either 1st of September or 1st of February. Faculty rules stipulate that the standard thesis writing period is four months. You may, however, be able to choose a six-month writing period also. In any case, your defence will take place approximately one month after hand-in.

Some notes for consideration with regard to writing period:

- Failure to hand in your thesis for assessment by the date you choose when signing the contract will mean you fail the exam and thus use your first thesis exam attempt (of three).
- If you choose the six-month writing period, please note that you will not be eligible for additional SU during the two-month extension (any unspent SU can obviously be spent during this period. For further inquiries regarding SU, please contact the SU Office at Aalborg University).
- Students can not expect supervision in July, which is formally considered the summer break.

... and an important note to **CCG students** regarding their choice of topic:

Make sure that the topic you propose includes the international/intercultural dimension that will allow us to accept your proposal as relevant to the CCG programme. Applications that fail to include this dimension will be rejected.

The approval of a thesis topic is not just a formality. The thesis coordinator must be able to make a decision of approval based on the content of your description. It is therefore necessary for thesis students to be as precise as possible when describing a prospective thesis topic – as difficult as this may be at this early stage of the process.

3) Submit the filled-in contract by e-mail to:

Programme Coordinator Robert C. Thomsen (thomsen@cgs.aau.dk) with a copy to Studies Secretary Malene Karmisholt (mka@cgs.aau.dk).

If you plan to write your thesis during the Spring, you must hand in your contract in early December. Similarly, if you plan to write your thesis during the autumn, you must hand in your contract in early August. The actual date may differ from one year to the next so please see Moodle or equivalent communication platform for the date relevant to you.

The programme coordinator will determine if your topic and your approach fall within the parameters of your programme academic framework. If they don't, you will be told to change parts of your contract to qualify.

4) When your topic is approved and a supervisor assigned to you, you will receive an e-mail letting you know who your supervisor will be. This will be close to the 1st of September/1st of February starting date, so please do not inquire until after that date.

It may turn out that your preferred supervisor is not available or is not relevant within the academic area of your thesis topic. In such a case, the thesis coordinator will identify another supervisor and assign this person to you.

5) At this point, please fill in any remaining parts of the contract, *sign and return a printed version of the contract* to your studies secretary.

You may now formally begin work on your thesis, consult with your supervisor, apply for travelling funds, and attend thesis seminars.

Once again, please note: the regulations require that before thesis writing can commence, all previous exams must be passed. Therefore, any assignment of a thesis supervisor is conditional, and requires that you pass all other exams in advance of thesis writing.

2.3 Communication and language

Since Master's programmes under the Study Board are offered and conducted in English, it is expected that you write your thesis in English. However the Regulations also state that: "Upon substantiated application from individual students, the study board may grant permission to conduct one or a number of examinations in Danish". This of course includes the thesis. Having almost concluded a programme in English, however, you should at this point be able to produce good academic work in that language. Also, keep in mind that these programmes profile themselves as internationally and interculturally oriented degrees, and a future employer is likely to frown at a candidate from such a programme still choosing not to write in the international language of English.

Having said that, there may well be reasons still to choose to write in Danish, such as the bulk of one's interviewees being Danish-speaking, or one's external partner (enterprise or organisation) preferring that. In such cases, you should seek dispensation from the study board immediately with the submission of your contract, if possible – also to ensure that the supervisor assigned to you will be one who is fluent in that language.

The evaluation of all written work, whether in English or Danish is based upon an evaluation of the proper use of language and the way in which the subject matter is presented (that is, students must be able to present complicated academic topics in a way that is well argued, well formulated (fluently and precisely), coherent in terms of the language used, and grammatically correct).

2.4 Organization of the writing process

Writing a thesis is not always a logical progression of steps. It can be difficult at first to evaluate what kind of consequences the reading of particular texts will have on the big picture. Sometimes it can be necessary to explore the periphery of a topic to understand how a particular analytical approach will affect the research. This means that the process of writing a thesis can seem both unpredictable and confusing, and consequently it is important that you know how you work best.

Roughly speaking, there are two fundamental - and at times conflicting - ways by which to organise the writing process. Nonetheless, students often choose a combination of both methods, with one dominating over the other. These approaches can be described by two types: The 'Bookworm', and the 'Editor'.

The Bookworm spends most of his/her time gathering and reading literature, taking notes and making outlines. The bookworm waits as long as possible with the writing phase of the thesis, preferring to update and edit all the information collected on the topic. Writing comes relatively late in the process and often takes place in an intense stretch of writing with very little content editing. The first meetings with an supervisor are often characterized by verbal discussions without reference to a written draft - at most, these discussions are stimulated by a bulleted list of key words or main ideas about the topic. The advantage with this method is that the bookworm is spared the time it takes to formulate something in writing which may later prove to be of little use. The disadvantage is that one can easily lose control; literature starts to build up and the student may feel like nothing is being produced. (S)he may also come under pressure, because the time set aside for writing the thesis is inconsistent with the time seemingly required by the topic. Furthermore, it makes it difficult for the supervisor to assess whether or not the process is on track.

The Editor, on the other hand, produces something in writing rather early. Visits to the library do not play a big role in the beginning. The editor often gets started by brainstorming and writing down thoughts that emerge during reflection upon the topic. During this process one writes about all the topics, areas and themes that are interesting and then spends time afterwards cleaning up the flow of thoughts. The editor will typically organize and systemize his or her thoughts with the help of mind maps and use these maps to search for relevant literature. Mind maps divide different subjects and areas into categories from which one can begin to tackle the project. The editor begins by reading the part that seems the most interesting or most accessible and then writes a number of pages. After a response from a supervisor and further reading, the first draft is rewritten and one can continue with a new section in the same way. The advantage of this method is that the editor can write toward an academically acceptable document and thereby maintain control and the feeling of "getting something done". The disadvantage is that the editor must accept that a lot of time will be spent on rewriting drafts, and sometimes entire sections or chapters will have to be discarded, because they are inconsistent with something that is accepted and incorporated at a later point. This can inhibit the desire to write, and it requires that one is willing to accept that there

may come a situation where it is necessary to scrap an earlier draft. At this point one must find the determination to get started again on a new draft.

In summary, no one can probably identify completely with one of these types, but you probably already know from earlier projects, which one you are most inclined to be. In any case, it is important during the earliest phases of thesis writing that you reflect on how you normally work, what the benefits and drawbacks of your working habits have been previously, and how, as a consequence, you wish to work on the thesis. Discuss this with your supervisor as well as how you gain the most from your supervision hours.

Keep in mind that so far this is the largest piece of text that you been asked to produce during your academic training. This means that it will require more in terms of overview, structuring (of work processes as well as text) and long-term planning (which might involve the collection of empirical data, research trips, etc.) than you are used to.

2.5 Writing at home or at the university?

You will have to consider not just how, but also where you will prefer to work on your thesis. To most, the choice is one between working at home and working at the university in the special area designated to thesis writers in Kroghstraede 1.

The disadvantage of working at home is that it demands much in terms of discipline and one's ability to motivate oneself. Obvious advantages on the other hand are that you can work at all times during the day and jump into your work whenever you feel inspired.

The advantage of bringing your laptop and literature to the university is that it makes it easier to consider writing a thesis a fulltime job. You'll have a sense that there is something to get up for at the beginning of the day and you can set your thesis aside again when you go home. It is also easier to maintain your academic and social relations to the university environment, such as your supervisor and your fellow graduate students. The disadvantage, however, may be that you need to share space with other thesis writers. Nonetheless, sharing space with other thesis students can also have a motivating effect. There is room for cooperation with respect to proofreading, constructive criticism and comments, eating lunch together in the canteen or simply agreeing to meet at a specific time each morning.

Regardless of whether you choose to work mostly at home or at the university, it is important that you allow yourself to take time off and that you allow yourself to have a bad – i.e. unproductive – day. If you do not allow yourself time off, the quality of your work can easily suffer, and, in the end, you may find yourself unsatisfied with the end product.

In terms of actually getting pages produced, in the beginning of the process your work on the thesis will seem rather invisible, so you might choose to write down in your planner how many hours you work each week, to allow you to assess the effort you put into thesis writing.

Remember: writing a thesis is full time work (which means you should put in 37 hours per week at minimum).

2.6 Financial support for thesis travel

Your thesis problem formulation and research design may require that you go abroad to collect data in the form of interviews, primary sources, observation, etc. In that case, there is financial support to be had. As a Master's student enrolled at Aalborg University you are eligible to apply for financial support for 'Funding to support short trips abroad dedicated to data collection for Master's thesis'. This grant is administered by the International Office, and you can read more about rules, documentation and deadlines at their website: http://internationaloffice.aau.dk/grants_scholarships/4833059

There are of course other sources of financial support to MA students, so if you plan to travel, seek them out. They are likely to be specific to the field or discipline within which you are writing, such as the Nordic Association for Canadian Studies Student Scholarship (www.nacs-anec.org/scholarships/) or of a more general nature.

2.7 Arranging your first meeting with the supervisor

It is important that the first meeting is held fairly early in the thesis process. It doesn't matter too much if your thesis is still in a nascent stage of development and that you can not present more than a sketchy outline for your thesis or potential analytical perspectives. Use your supervisor to help you clear things up.

You should take this opportunity to coordinate the process of writing your thesis with your supervisor, so both of you are more or less in agreement concerning the content and the form. During the first meeting you can expect your supervisor to voice his/her expectations to you, such as meeting deadlines, taking proper notes, providing draft materials for commenting in good time, etc. – and you should use this meeting to do the same: state your expectations for the thesis (aiming for excellence, or happy just to pass?) and the supervision process (how critical and of which parts of your work in particular would you like the supervisor to be?).

Academic issues as well as personal relationships – such as financial restrictions, part-time employment or children – that may affect your ability to work full time on your thesis should also be mentioned to your supervisor, so respective expectations to the entire process are as realistic and specific as possible.

On this occasion you and your supervisor should try to produce a tentative plan at least for the first few months of the process and schedule meetings during those – the fact that it is ‘tentative’ means the plan can always be adjusted later, based on need.

More about the role of the supervisor later in the handbook (4.1 ‘On supervision and your supervisor’).

3. Getting started, academic issues

3.1 Choosing a topic

It probably comes as no surprise that choosing a thesis topic has a great impact on the process of writing a thesis. It is crucial that you choose a subject with which it is unlikely that you will grow tired. So you need to consider if a thesis topic is interesting enough to keep your intellectual fire burning and to keep you going for a whole semester

You should probably try to choose a topic that lies fairly close to the academic areas with which you are familiar from your previous studies, to ensure that you won’t have to start from a theoretical and methodological ‘scratch’. Many students, when choosing a thesis topic, draw upon projects and assignments that they have done in previous semesters. Reusing previous work is not acceptable, of course, but there are often research issues from previous projects that can be studied from a different angle or new aspects that can be used to generate new research. Apart from the theoretical and methodological head start, the advantage of this approach is that you already know the topic and some relevant literature, and therefore it is easier to limit the scope of your research objectives. At the same time, however, it should be new and fascinating enough for you to maintain your curiosity and interest.

If you have no idea what to do your research on, it would probably be a good idea to talk with recent graduates. It is also possible to access previously defended theses in the Aalborg University Library ‘Project Library’ database (<http://projekter.aau.dk/projekter/en/>). If you choose to browse the ‘Student thesis’ category, you should be wonderfully inspired!

The topic in which you choose to write your thesis must, of course, be developed from the programme’s central areas of focus, as defined by the Regulations and Curriculum (see section 1.1 ‘Topic requirements’ above). As stated there, **CCG students** must also ensure that there is an international/intercultural dimension to their thesis. After all, your degree will be in ‘Culture, Communication and Globalization’. This means your thesis topic can not be exclusively mono-cultural (e.g. how does an organisation develop a marketing strategy for the same national/cultural market in which it finds itself). Most theses are inspired by what has been taught and practiced at the programme, which means this dimension is a natural part of the topic or approach. In the few cases where the international/intercultural dimension is not obviously present, this can be ensured e.g. by introducing a comparative aspect (how has this

been done elsewhere, to which extent can this approach be applied?) or by applying theory which has been developed on the basis of/to account for situations or processes in a different national or cultural context.

3.2 The good problem formulation

Having chosen a topic for your thesis, you must now narrow down the focus of your topic to 'distil' your problem formulation. By this stage of your studies you should have a pretty good idea about what characterises the good problem formulation. You should primarily draw on that useful experience from previous projects and assignments, but in the following paragraphs the basic tenets of problem formulation will be (re-)introduced for your inspiration.

Formulating a problem is basically about putting into writing something that 'puzzles' you. It should grow out of your wondering about something – thus the 'problem' (which needs not be a problem in the negative sense, as something that is not working, that needs fixing). It can, for example, be the problem of a gap between how a phenomenon is described in the academic literature and how you have experienced it to be.

The problem formulation becomes the "starting point directing the students' learning process and situates the learning in a context" (Barge 2010). In this sense, the problem formulation sets out the relationship between the breadth and depth of a thesis.

For you to be able to ensure coherence throughout the thesis from introduction (into which the problem formulation goes) to conclusion, you must start out with a doable and manageable research problem before you get into any detailed considerations about methodology, or analysis.

It is a good idea to formulate your problem before developing an outline. It does not necessarily have to be formulated as one or more questions, but might read something like "This thesis set out to explore the causes of ... Furthermore, it aims to...". It is often helpful, however, also to narrow down the focus of the thesis in the form of research questions.

Whereas the methodology will be asking questions of the 'how' kind: 'how do I plan to go about answering my problem formulation?', the problem formulation itself will be asking questions of the 'what' and 'why' kind: what will this thesis investigate or achieve, why is that relevant or important, and why are the elements of your problem formulation knit together in the particular fashion that you suggest is useful/relevant?. A problem formulation, therefore, should also contextualise in order to argue why this particular problem is relevant and worthwhile.

To inspire your own creative process, here's a list of criteria that can help you ensure the quality of your problem formulation. The good problem formulation:

- Is 'curious', seeks to explore a 'problem' (not aimed simply at describing or giving an account of a phenomenon)
- Is original (rather than copying what has been done before).
- Is academic (as opposed to commonsensical, non-theoretical)
- Is relevant
- Is properly contextualised
- Has a clear focus
- Is written in precise language, formulated in a few lines
- Is an open question (not calling for a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer)
- Is possible to answer
- Is properly reflecting what is actually in the report and, eventually, the conclusion.

4. While in process

4.1 On supervision and your supervisor

Supervision is offered only during that semester in which you have requested it in the thesis contract. 22 hours are allotted to supervisors for supervision of individually produced theses (groups of two: 36 hours; groups of three: 45 hours). This allotment includes not just face-to-face supervision or electronic correspondence between you and her/him, but also your supervisor's preparation for meetings, her/his critical reading and commenting on drafts, assessment of the final thesis report, evaluating with the external examiner, and the oral defence. Consequently, as a solo thesis writer you can not expect more than five meetings or major electronic correspondences with your supervisor. Even though you should keep this limited number of hours and meetings in mind when arranging meetings with your supervisor, this should not cause you to spend as little time as possible with your supervisor. It just means that you must make the best possible use of the time available. For this reason also, don't ask your supervisor to keep commenting on the same piece of text. As a rule, once should be sufficient, and should allow the supervisor to read everything you write once – if you make sure to present it to him/her in good time before your meetings.

Experience says that it is always useful for thesis writers to spend much time with the supervisor in the early phases of writing and to consult with her/him about the complicated but crucial early items: problem formulation and methodological considerations. With at least a preliminary, rough version of these in place, and you and your supervisor agreeing to the relevance and benefit of this particular formulation and this research design, venturing into the following sections of your thesis becomes much less risky.

It is a good idea to develop a fairly regular meeting schedule, with deadlines at which you agree to submit drafts for discussion at subsequent meetings. It is very important that you send your supervisor drafts for discussion well in advance so that (s)he can prepare properly for your meetings, and give you the feedback you need. You should also, when possible

attach reading instructions to your drafts, so as to ensure that your supervisor focuses on those parts that you are particularly interested in discussing or receiving assistance with regard to. The nature of drafts is to be unfinished, but try to make them as finished as possible before sending them off to your supervisor. Mind-maps and scattered notes are likely to make sense only to you.

As regards the practice of supervision meetings, there are a few essentials:

- 1) Always bring an exact copy of the draft material that you asked your supervisor to comment on – either in print or on your laptop. Why? a) your supervisor is very likely to refer to specific paragraphs and sentences, and you will be able to note her/his comments at the exact place in your own copy. b) There is no point in wasting your supervision hours with having your supervisor comment on versions of text that have since been revised so that the comments are no longer relevant.
- 2) Always take notes. Why? You may think that you will be able to remember all the comments made and recall good pieces of advice later, but why risk missing something important?

4.2 Thesis writing workshops

Once a month during every semester workshops are offered for thesis students, The workshops are to large degree student-driven in that they focus on issues that you are struggling with in terms of research design, data collection, conceptual discussion, analysis, as well as the process of writing a thesis (motivation, scheduling and planning). You will get the opportunity to learn about other students' work and present your own ongoing research in a forum facilitated by a lecturer.

Presentations are normally 10 to 15 minutes and can, for example, be on preliminary considerations about delimitations of the problem formulation, methodological considerations about how your study is best designed and carried out, theoretical considerations, and preliminary results of your analysis.

Workshop presentations are considered 'work in progress' to help you get new ideas and perspectives on your work, so don't be shy, but do attend and be active at these workshops, and benefit from the learning environment. You do not need to have a perfect and polished slideshow for you or fellow students to profit from your presentation. Apart from student presentations, the workshops also consist of roundtable discussions on any questions or themes which are relevant to thesis writers present.

If you are in the initial stage of writing a thesis, you may want to present a synopsis, outline or early methodological considerations. These will then be discussed in a group forum, where participants can respond with good ideas, references to relevant literature or share their

experiences with similar problems. If you are in the intermediate stage, you may want to present a more precise description of potential problem areas, e.g. to encourage theoretical discussion. Be prepared to incorporate relevant criticism and suggestions brought forward in these forums.

As a thesis student you may still, of course, participate in any programme courses that seem relevant to you. Just take a look at the list of courses offered in Moodle and contact the teacher(s) in question to inquire about the possibility of sitting in (teachers should be happy to allow you in, but practical issues, such as space and seats available, may occasionally prevent them from doing so).

4.3 Writer's block

Some thesis students experience the phenomenon known as 'writer's block', whereas others experience it seldom or never. Psychologist Lotte Rienecker who wrote *Texts on Time – Avoiding Writer's Block* defines the concept in the following way: "every impediment to the free expression of ideas on paper".

A lot depends on how you approach the task of writing a thesis. If your ambitions are sky high (and perhaps unrealistic) you risk wearing yourself out. Again, it is important that you reflect on your own capabilities and what you may realistically expect to achieve. Otherwise, the end result may be that you develop a fear that your work is never good enough. If your ambitions are not consistent with what you are ready to produce at a particular moment, you may not even be able to put pen to paper.

Good advice is often to be had from previous thesis writers. If you run into writer's block, you may want to let yourself get inspired by the experiences offered by these two graduates:

"I can spend a whole day on the first line of a chapter introduction. Over time I have taught myself not to freeze up at this point. For me it is often best to let the actual introduction wait and to go directly to the main point. I also run into problems when I am just about finished with a text (whether it is a chapter or even a project or thesis). All of a sudden I freeze up and I feel like I can't gather up the loose ends and write an appropriate conclusion. I have begun to read this as a sign that the text is finished, instead of interpreting it as a mental block. Just because I feel like I'm not finished writing (that is, I can't set it aside) doesn't necessarily mean that the text is missing something."

Another graduate says:

"I experienced writer's block several times while I was working on my thesis and I figured out that the only way to move forward was to force myself to sit at my 'work station' for a designated number of hours each day, even though many

hours were spent sending emails and surfing the internet. Finally I got tired of wasting time with other things and sat myself down and wrote my thesis.”

For further advice on how to reduce writing anxiety, please see the bibliography towards the end of this handbook.

4.4 Completely stuck ... what now?

Writing a thesis is an academically and personally demanding process, and some students find themselves simply stuck with no energy or ideas as to how to proceed, and unable to move on. Should this occur to you, it is important that you do not isolate yourself and that you look for help or guidance immediately when this becomes clear to you.

Unless your problem is of a very personal kind, your first port of call should be your supervisor. In addition, you are always welcome to seek council from:

- Your local Student Advisor for CCG (email: ccgtourism@cgs.aau.dk) – this advisor will be a fellow student, which means (s)he is someone who may understand your circumstances pretty well, but also that (s)he is not trained or supposed to assist you in personal matters unrelated to the programme.
- Your programme coordinator
- The Student Guidance Office (*Studerter-rådgivningen*) – www.srg.dk/.
- The AAU Learning Lab – entirely for academic counselling.

On their website the AAU Learning Lab informs about its services: “If [...] you have been writing on your thesis for more than one semester, AAU Learning Lab offers to guide you in the process of formulating and structuring your thesis. The guidance is available for both Danish and English speaking students. [...] The guidance *does not replace* academic supervision but should be seen as *a supplement*.”

More information at: www.learninglab.aau.dk/index.php?id=9153&L=1

5. Submission

Three weeks before you submit your thesis (five weeks if you hand in 31 July), you must submit your title, table of contents and introduction (including your problem formulation) electronically to your studies secretary. This is in order to be able to plan your exam (the

availability of your supervisor/examiner and your external examiner must be ensured). When you submit your thesis, it is important that it is free of spelling errors and content inconsistencies. Ask a competent person to proofread your thesis before you submit it regardless of whether you write in English or Danish.

The thesis must be submitted in three hard copies (one for the supervisor, external examiner and the exams office) to your studies secretary, and you must fill in and include the *Standard Front Page for Examination Papers* (Available on the Moodle site of the School of Culture and Global Studies).

You need to upload your thesis to the University Library via this link: <http://projekter.aau.dk>. If necessary, you can choose to upload it in a way so that it stays confidential, meaning only AAU personnel involved in your assessment can access it.

5.1 Your Master's degree diploma

In the expectation that you will receive your degree after having successfully defended your thesis, this would be a good time to download the application form for having your Master's degree diploma issued. It can be downloaded here:

http://fak.hum.aau.dk/fileadmin/FAK/studerende_blanketter/bevis_anmodning/kandidat-master_ny.pdf

Please note that the thesis title you write into this form is the one which will be printed on your diploma. For example, if you write the whole title with capital letters, it will also be in capital letters on your diploma. Also, if you want both the title and subtitle of your thesis on your diploma, it is important that both are written on the form.

5.2 Practical procedure on failure to hand in thesis by deadline

Should you fail to hand in your thesis by the set date, you will use one of three exam attempts (your final diploma and transcript, however, will not indicate number of attempts made towards any exam). In order to continue your thesis work, you must re-submit your thesis contract to your Programme Coordinator for approval.

The re-submitted contract should include altered dates (see below regarding these) and a revised problem formulation. You will not be expected to write a new thesis, but to continue working on your thesis within the same subject. However, your problem formulation must be significantly altered/expanded to warrant the additional three months granted for the completion of the thesis (replacing single words, e.g., will not qualify as revision). Make sure to correspond with your supervisor about these changes and get his/her approval before re-submitting.

Dates: If your revised contract is approved, you will formally begin your second exam attempt 15 days after the deadline you failed to meet, and your new hand-in date will be three months later – with your thesis defence taking place approximately one month later. You must include these dates in your revised contract before submission.

If you have not fully used the hours allocated to you for supervision, your supervisor should be able to supervise your second attempt also – no additional hours will be allocated. In any case, unless unavailable for other reasons, (s)he will be your examiner at the thesis defence.

6. Examination

Approximately one month after submitting your thesis you will be defending it at an oral exam. This means thesis exams normally take place by the end of June or the end of March. Your supervisor (who is now your examiner) and the external examiner will each have assessed the qualities of your thesis report, and they will have questions and inquiries on the basis of their reading. If you have produced your thesis as a group, group members will be examined individually.

Much as you are used to from other such events, the examination will be conducted as a dialogue between the student, the examiner and (to a lesser degree) the external examiner. The thesis defence differs from your ordinary project exam by its duration of 45 minutes. These however, include examiners' evaluation and communication of your grade with their motivation, so in practice this mean you will be busy for only about 35 of those minutes. 35 minutes may still seem like a long time, but most students find that time flies at the exam. In fact, after having spent four months producing your most comprehensive and, hopefully, best work to date, you are likely to feel you could have gone on for much longer.

Just as you have been used to at project exams, you should begin this exam by making a short presentation (no longer than 5 minutes). Try to ensure that your oral presentation offers new perspectives and ideas, not just repetition of what is included in the thesis. Practice several times in advance until you are confident that you can stay on time and that you are not overly dependent on your manuscript. Do not offer a correction sheet with corrections of commas and spelling mistakes and other minor errors at the exam. Rather, make sure your thesis is thoroughly proofread before you hand it in. Following your presentation you and your examiners engage in discussion about elements in the thesis singled out by them as particularly relevant. Don't feel intimidated or insulted if your examiner insists on challenging you with difficult questions. (S)he would not be doing a proper job if not trying to push you to perform at your very best. If you were only thrown 'easy balls', this would not give you the opportunity to excel, to illustrate how well you know your data, how methodologically aware you are, etc. Pushing you to the limit (but not over it), your examiner tries to ensure that you will not leave the room thinking: "I feel I could have done much better!"

Filing a Complaint

If you have substantial objections to the conduct of the oral exam or to another part of your thesis module, please address your programme coordinator about this. On the basis of this conversation you may decide whether you wish to file a formal complaint with the Director of the Study Board. If you wish to file a complaint over a grade, the usual procedure for examination complaints will be followed. If a complaint concerning a thesis grade results in the student being offered a new evaluation, a new internal examiner and a new external examiner will be assigned. For further information, see: <http://fak.hum.aau.dk/index.php?id=908>

7. Literature about academic studies and writing

Students are not expected to read hefty academic works about thesis composition before starting upon their own theses, but there are some good books that may inspire you or serve as a source of reference during your writing process. The following titles merely represent a selection from within the genre; there are plenty more available!

- Barge, Scott (2010): 'Principles of Problem and Project Based Learning: the Aalborg PBL Model'. Aalborg: Aalborg University. Available for download in PDF format at : http://files.portal.aau.dk/filessharing/download?filename=aau/aau/2010/~/-pub/PBL_aalborg_modellen.pdf].
- Crene, Phyllis and Mary R. Lea (2003): *Writing at University. A guide for students*. Berkshire: Open University Press, second edition.
- Elbow, Peter (1998): *Writing with Power: techniques for mastering the writing process*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rienecker, Lotte (1992): *Tekster til tiden: undgå skriveblokeringer*. Copenhagen: Dansk psykologisk forlag.
- Wagner, Wolf (1979): *Uni-Angst und Uni-Bluff. Wie studieren und sich nicht verliehren*. Berlin: Rotbuch.

Good luck and enjoy!